the escapist

EDITOR'S NOTE

by Julianne Greer

An entire issue on a topic as nebulous and daunting, yet as timely as adaptation?

I say timely because of the recent upswing of games released alongside their movie counterparts. Everyone who went to see the Book to Big Screen adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* in the theater, can pop by the local game store (by way of the chocolatier) to take all the zany, delicious fun home.

But how many will actually buy the game? And of those that do, how many will enjoy the game? Is it made to enhance the Canon of Games or just a marketing tool made to enhance the Canon of Stuff used to promote the feature film?

Everything I've read about *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the game, just feels like, unfortunately, it might be the latter of the two Canons. I find this depressing. I read Dahl's books as a child and loved them. Despite its differences from the books, the old version of the movie still holds nostalgic value for me. And the new movie, that kept some of the slightly irreverent-but-not-in-a-negative-way tone of the books, was delightful.

Yet, even with this lifetime of fandom, I cannot even think about owning or playing the game. Why? *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was a book about the importance of the innocence of childhood, the importance of family, and of integrity as something that starts with, but does not end with, grown-ups. And while I fully believe that videogames will have the capability to deliver themes like these, in a way that does them justice, in the future – we are just not at that state of the industry right now.

But we will never get to that state of the industry until we go through the growing pains we are currently experiencing. We, developers, licensors and gamers alike, are all learning what translates well and what should not be translated at all. Whether the results are fantastic or atrocious, the process is necessary to ensure the proper growth, the strongest growth of the industry. That is, after all, the point of adaptation.

To that end, in this issue, you will find many different writers' takes on the topic of adaptation. Tom Chick speaks to the multitude of movie crossovers of late, while Allen Varney, in speaking with Warren Spector, relates a more broad view on the role of adaptation in the industry. Joe Blancato explores a unique subset of games – those that adapt themselves to the player. Enjoy these articles and more in this week's issue of *The Escapist*.

Julianne Greer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the editor: I really enjoyed the article "Return of the Future" by Shawn Williams. The Retro Phenomenon is often discussed in music and design, but I never thought of someone applying it to video games. After reading the article, I'm convinced that the nostalgia for older games is inevitable; the future Williams shows us is not only likely, it's just a matter of time.

-Timothy St. Hilaire

To the editor: Thanks for answering my last letter with an entire issue! I enjoyed all your pieces on the future of gaming, but it wasn't until casual Friday that something really connected. "LifeGame 2020" was darkly prophetic and eerily believable. Allen Varney hit me in kind of the same way that Orwell did when I read 1984. And "Return of the Future" was refreshingly brilliant. Thanks again for a great read.

-Nick Coen

To the editor: I wrote before to comment on the readability of text and background colors, thanks for improving it :) I also just finished reading 'Future Imperfect' and I thought it made some excellent points.

As an MMORPGer of five years, I'm really hoping that gaming companies do start to produce games with more focus on building than smashing things. Before it lost most of it's players, Star Wars Galaxies was the best online game I've ever been a part of because it was so people-driven, and the ability to build things and run your own shop was so much fun. I've also checked out Second Life a few times, but like the article said, it's still so clunky that it seems like too much hassle to play. I'm looking forward to the day that companies like Blizzard implement the concepts and customizations found in SWG and Second Life.

I'm going to pass this one onto my friends, thanks for a great article and ezine!

-Harmony Steel.

To the editor: As a response to your article "Escaping the Box" and the author's stipulation that the combination of game play style and genres would potentially help a product's sales, I would like to respond by saying that the consumers have proven over and over again that they will not purchase a game which they cannot immediately understand. Perhaps this is due (in part) to improper marketing or inadequate product presentation (i.e. box design, etc.), but I contend that if the core mechanics of the gameplay cannot be immediately grasped by the consumer, then that consumer will usually choose to seek a more "comfortable" alternative. By comfortable alternative, I mean a sequel to a game that they've played before or a game quite similar to one they've enjoyed.

Katamari Damacy succeeds because its premise is succinct and clear despite being entirely uncommon and refreshingly innovative. The consumer may not "like" the inherent gameplay that is being offered to him, but he will not be impeded by the inability to understand the game's mechanics. Simplicity in design is what will most

often yield this education of the consumer, not by adding complexity or blurring the genre boundaries. This is a challenge every developer struggles with when trying to execute a truly innovative game concept, how they will be able to communicate that concept to the consumer in terms that they can relate to and understand.

The prospect of direct-to-consumer on-line sales via mail order and digital downloads provides developers with some hope for the future, but so far consumers initially seem resistant to the concept. Also, foreign markets have shown that buying gaming products on-line (with a credit card) is not their preferred method of purchase, but rather walking in and purchasing a game from their favorite "brick and mortar" retailer is favored.

If the author feels as though innovation is being thwarted (and I probably would not argue with that assertion), then he/she is certainly encouraged to support those developers who provide their products directly to the consumer. In doing so, the developer can remain profitable (by eliminating the

"middlemen") while still catering to a smaller audience that is willing to take a chance on something fresh and new. As it currently stands, conventional retail distribution has a very low probability of yielding anything resembling profitability for any but the most "financially creative" developers (especially those residing in the U.S. where development costs are considerably higher).

-Anonymous Game Developer

LICENSING: LIVE WITH IT

Warren Spector says we can thrive through adaptation
by Allen Varney

"The biggest names in Hollywood want to get into games," says Warren Spector. "Movies aren't showing double-digit annual growth any more, the way the game industry does. People in Hollywood say, 'Okay, four out of five games lose money, just like movies - but if I get a hit like *Halo* or *Grand Theft Auto* I can make, what, a hundred million, 200 million? And making a game costs way less than making a movie? Wow!' So I've been meeting with lots of people - they're flying me around first class - it's just nuts."

Hollywood is interested in Warren Spector. When he's not running his new Junction Point Studios in Austin, Texas, the designer/producer is meeting with SoCal industry bigwigs who can write nine-figure checks. The execs know how to talk with him; Spector has a master's degree in Radio-TV-Film from the University of Texas–Austin, where he wrote his thesis on Warner Brothers cartoons and taught courses on film production. "I know just enough to be dangerous."

But more to the point, he has what they want. With 16 years of experience producing computer games, first for Origin (*Ultima VI: The False Prophet, Ultima VII Part 2: Serpent Isle, Ultima Underworld 1 and 2, System Shock*, and many more), then Looking Glass Technologies and ION Storm Austin (*Deus Ex, Thief: Deadly Shadows*), Spector offers what the studios prize: A track record.

"At these Hollywood meetings, the same thing has happened to me more than once, with multiple people," he says. "I describe the game I want to do. I tell them, 'I can deliver you a triple-A title for this cost.'" Spector names a high figure; no one has ever yet written a check that big. "They think it over. Then they say, 'What could you do with twice as much money?'

"I think the big media players may be here to stay this time. The Hollywood establishment mostly isn't setting up game publishing and development arms the way they have in the past; they seem more interested in partnering with people in the game business, using our expertise instead of assuming theirs translates over. It isn't just movie studios looking to get into games, it's the media conglomerates that own the movie studios. Also, the major agencies - CAA, ICM, and others - are moving into the game space, bringing their clout and packaging prowess. There's a more integrated approach to things that makes me think this time it's for real. It might even succeed."

So we'll continue to see publishers licensing movies and TV for adaptation as games. Is this syndrome, as some argue, strangling the industry? Does it mean the death of creative game design?

Not to Spector. More than perhaps anyone in the game business, Warren Spector sees licensing as an opportunity.

Betting Safe
If you write much about the electronic game industry, you can save time by defining certain phrases as macros in your word processor: "risk-averse publishers," "spiraling development costs," "studios caught in the middle," and more. The terms pepper every discussion of the benighted state of electronic gaming. Production costs rise faster than sales, so it grows ever more expensive for newcomers to enter the market. Out of thousands of games released every year, major retailers stock fewer than 200. A game may have a shelf life measured in weeks, and the top 20 titles capture the bulk of the profits. Most of the rest fail disastrously.

In this environment, the few remaining game publishers seek the known, the reliable. They seek licenses, which bring pre-sold audiences. They want

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developers to work on licensed games, not new concepts. "The irony," observes Spector (among many others!), "is that *The Sims* wasn't a licensed property, *Grand Theft Auto* wasn't licensed, *Diablo*... The big hits are the original properties. But licenses are the safe bets."

Some find this situation abominable. Not Spector. At the March 2003 Game Developers Conference in San Jose, CA, in his design keynote speech "Sequels & Adaptations: Design Innovation in a Risk-Averse World" (http://www. gamasutra.com/features/20030416/ spector_01.shtml), Spector took a pragmatic approach. Without addressing whether it was desirable to make licensed games, he argued that if developers can secure nothing but licensed projects, they should embrace the job and challenge themselves. Citing advantages a license gives, such as free

marketing, fan buy-in, and "cool sandboxes to play in," Spector advised developers to "find ways to innovate within [the] boundaries of player expectation and publisher need. Games are not driven by fiction, character or context. Games are driven by gameplay."

Spector's GDC keynote received strongly mixed reviews: "Half the audience reviled me for weeks after," he says. "Half the audience hailed me as a hero. I figure that constituted a total success. I believe every word I said up on that stage, and [I] hoped to hell my beliefs would get people hopping mad and thinking."

He got Greg Costikyan, anyway. A longtime industry gadfly and proponent of alternative ways to make and sell games - and Spector's old prep-school buddy at the Horace Mann School in New York City - Costikyan posted a lengthy

rebuttal on his blog (http://www.costik. com/weblog/2003_03_01_blogchive. html#90629281). "[There's] nothing wrong with sequels and licensed products - in moderation. The problem [...] is that they're beginning to overwhelm original work. Here we are, like Balboa, shocked with wild surmise as we face a vast unknown Pacific of enormous creative possibility - and all we can do is licensed drivel?"

Blogless himself, Spector responded on Costikyan's home turf (http://www. costik.com/weblog/2003_03_01_ blogchive.html#90613444): "I hold up my own career as an example of the ability to do original work in someone else's sandbox." He observed that, apart from *System Shock* and *Deus Ex*, "every computer/videogame I've worked on has been a sequel or derivative. On every one of them, I had to negotiate to find my own creative space and on every one of them, I feel I succeeded."

Spector said, "I firmly believe that, if developer and licensor (and publisher) get on the same page about what people expect - a dialogue that clearly has to be driven primarily by the licensor, I admit -

you can still do creative work in someone else's universe."

Ironically, when he wrote this, Spector had never done an actual licensed computer game.

Two years later, he still hasn't. But he might.

Open to Possibilities
Two years on, licensing dominates gaming even more heavily. At the Free Play independent games conference in Melbourne last month, Costikyan addressed developers in a rabble-rousing keynote speech called "Death to the Games Industry (Long Live Games)" (http://141.211.101.120/ DeathToTheGamesIndustry.pdf): "We've explored only a tiny portion of the possible in games. [There are] doubtless

> **Spector acknowledges not every property can make a good game - though in many cases this is simply because the hardware isn't there yet.**

dozens of commercially feasible styles not yet discovered. Innovative novels [are] published every year, and that's a medium 300 years old." But unless the industry changes "we're all going to be doing nothing but making nicer road textures and better-lit car models for games with the same gameplay as *Pole Position* for all eternity."

At Junction Point Studios, Spector is hiring his team for an unannounced fantasy game. It's his own concept, not licensed. But he'd definitely consider a license; in fact, he looks downright wistful. Still, all he says aloud is, "Sure, I'm interested. The right license gives you a good shot at reaching an audience that already wants - and may already have paid for something like - what you're trying to give them."

Is this just the musing of a startup boss looking for more funding? Possibly. And why not? Unlike many developers, Spector can pretty much make the game he wants. Over the years, working with many designers at Origin, Looking Glass, and ION Storm, Spector has chosen a gameplay style - defined it, really - that is (as he said at the GDC) not driven by fiction, character or context. His games

INTERVIEW WITH WARREN SPECTOR

We asked a few personal questions of Warren Spector and he obliged. Read on to learn more about what makes him tick - or at least busy.

Where are you from?
New York City, then Chicago, now (and for the last 27 years, barring a two year diaspora in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin) Austin, Texas. Next stop, the grave!

Age?
49

Do you have a family?
I have a lovely and talented writer-wife, Caroline Spector (whose latest novel is available for preorder at http://www. amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0974573426/104-0977784-3654367), a crazy dog named Maggie and four cats (Beezil, Dave, Floyd and George Frankenkitty).

What's your favorite game to play?
Big question! I have way too many boardgame favorites to list (most of them German); on the electronic side I'm currently Nintendo DS-obsessed (*Elecktroplankton*… *WarioWare*… mmm….). I recently started playing *Half Life 2* again and love it. But if you want my favorite videogame ever, it'd have to be *Legend of Zelda: Link to the Past* for the SNES (or GBA).

What's the last movie you went to see?
Stealth. Laura Ziskin, who produced it, optioned the film rights to Deus Ex and she let me read the Stealth script like three years ago, so I had to see the finished film!

What's your alcoholic beverage of choice, if any?
Slivovitz. Google it! One site says, "Slivovitz is a gift from God, and must be treated with respect," to which I can only say, "Amen!"

What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?
Man, I hate to be boring but is there anything better than vanilla, with chocolate sauce? If only I weren't lactose intolerant - thank god for frozen yogurt!

What is your favorite vacation spot?
A place in the Texas Hill Country that I won't name publicly. I want it all to myself!

Who is the person you most respect in the industry?
Can I have two? First, Doug Church, a great friend and incredible collaborator - a true, unsung hero in the game business. Second, Will Wright. I mean, how can you not love a guy who's THAT nice and creative and not a raving ego-maniac? And it's inspirational to see innovative games selling as well as Will's do these days! Go, Will!

are affected no more by a license, or lack of it, than by the color of their CD's jewel case.

After he designed and produced Deus Ex in 2000, gaming magazines and web sites started calling Spector "legendary." He rolls his eyes at the term, but he does cop to a different and perhaps more important label: "I'm a brand."

A Warren Spector-brand game is a story-driven roleplaying game in a highly interactive setting with a large solution space. His "immersive sims" are not about deducing the designer's defined solutions to puzzles, but about creating rich environments where each player can try different tactics to achieve a defined goal. Every player charts a unique path through the game, and situations are carefully balanced to reward different play styles equally. It's all about "sharing authorship of the gameplay experience with our collaborators - our players."

This sort of approach works as well in a borrowed world as in an original. "A cool universe or a marketable character [are] almost irrelevant to the gameplay experience I think players want and deserve."

Of course, Spector acknowledges not every property can make a good game – though in many cases this is simply because the hardware isn't there yet. "Suppose you were running a film company in 1925 [the silent era]. Irving Berlin writes a terrific Broadway musical. Making a movie of that show would be a terrible idea, because what makes it great isn't the 'boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl' story - it's Irving Berlin's music! That's where we are in the game industry." He means current game tech hasn't yet matured even to the talking-picture stage. "For every project, we have to invent the camera all over again. And then we have to invent lighting and sound and all the characters ... "

Spector thinks a lot in film terms, which is one reason the Hollywood executives like him. Another reason may possibly be his current openness to a licensing deal. He's not saying anything about that right now. Yet as he wrote to Greg Costikyan, "A game concept occasionally crosses over to the other side of the media divide, but [...] it's far more common for content to travel the other way. With costs and schedules and risks going up, I think we're stuck in that world for the foreseeable future, so we have to make the most of it."

Allen Varney is a freelance writer and game designer based in Austin, Texas. His published work includes six books, three board games, and nearly two dozen role-playing game supplements.
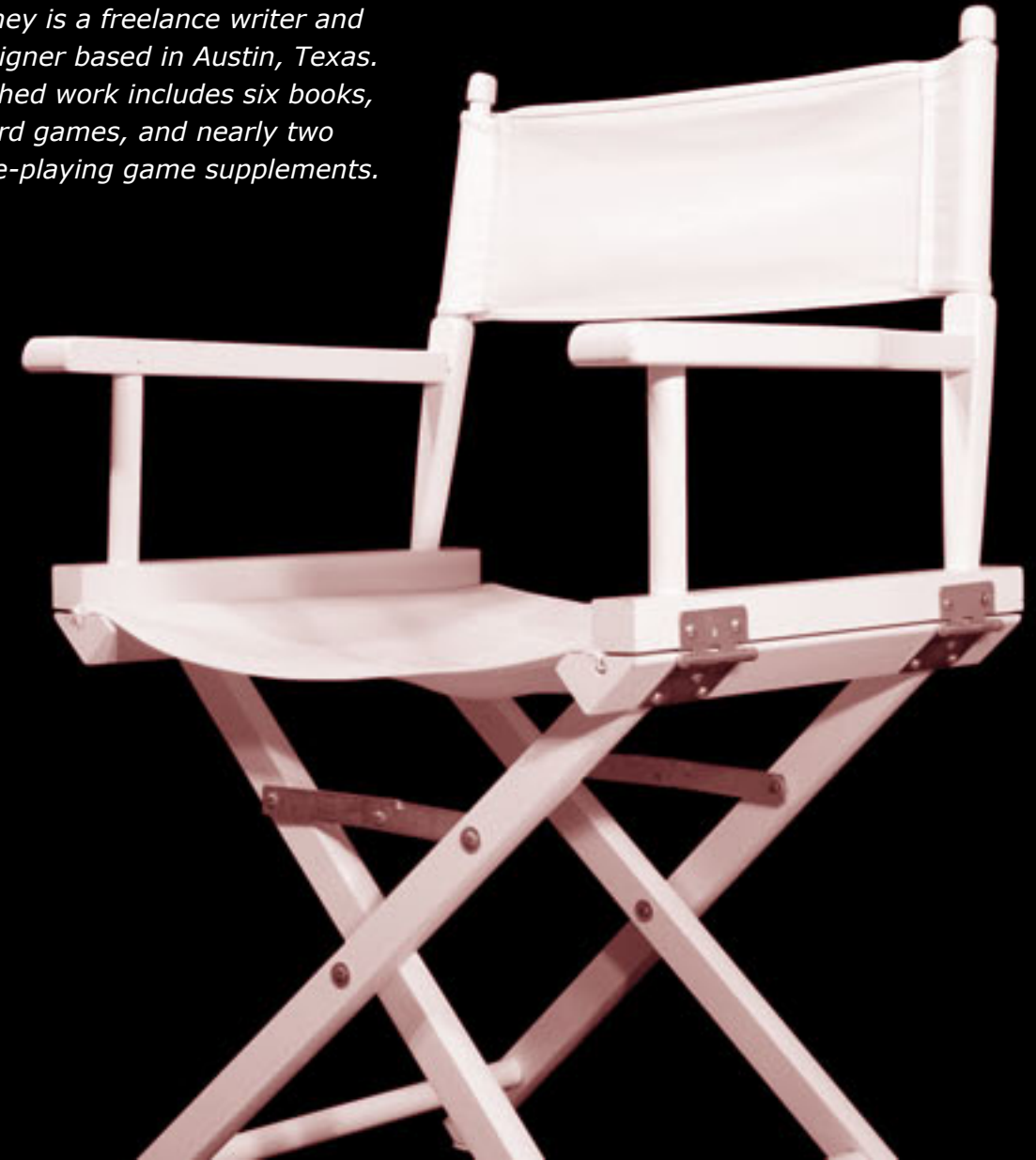
THINKING *SPACE INVADERS*

by Joe Blancato

Adaptation is what ensures survival. Everything adapts to its environment, or it dies. In an environment as socially Darwinian as the free games market, this is especially true. This truth is why many sequels are bad; the games do not change, even though we, the players, have. Many of the big companies, the industry's version of the great white shark, pump out high budget sequels so efficient at being fun, we're still not tired of them. But many developers are working on techniques to make our games adapt to us, and they're using techniques billions of years old.

Genetic algorithms, they're called. They're a relatively simple process: Send out a group of subjects, give them a goal, and the ones who achieve it survive to pass their methods onto the next generation of subjects. It's an incredibly popular design method in real-time strategy games and first-person shooters. Bots learn to adapt to your habits and theoretically "grow" to be able to predict what you do, zig when you zag, and turn you into a rag doll.

But we're not quite there yet. Since the concept of genetic programming was dreamed up in the mid 1960's, innovation has been staggering across the board. Still, computers are pretty lacking when it comes to problem solving on a broad scale. They do not have the distinctly biological ability to, well, adapt on the fly without any programming help from a human. But as a species, they're only 50 years old; we're about 500,000. They have a distinctive future edge, though: intelligent design. It's a topic that's up for debate in the real world, but digitally, everything has a goal.
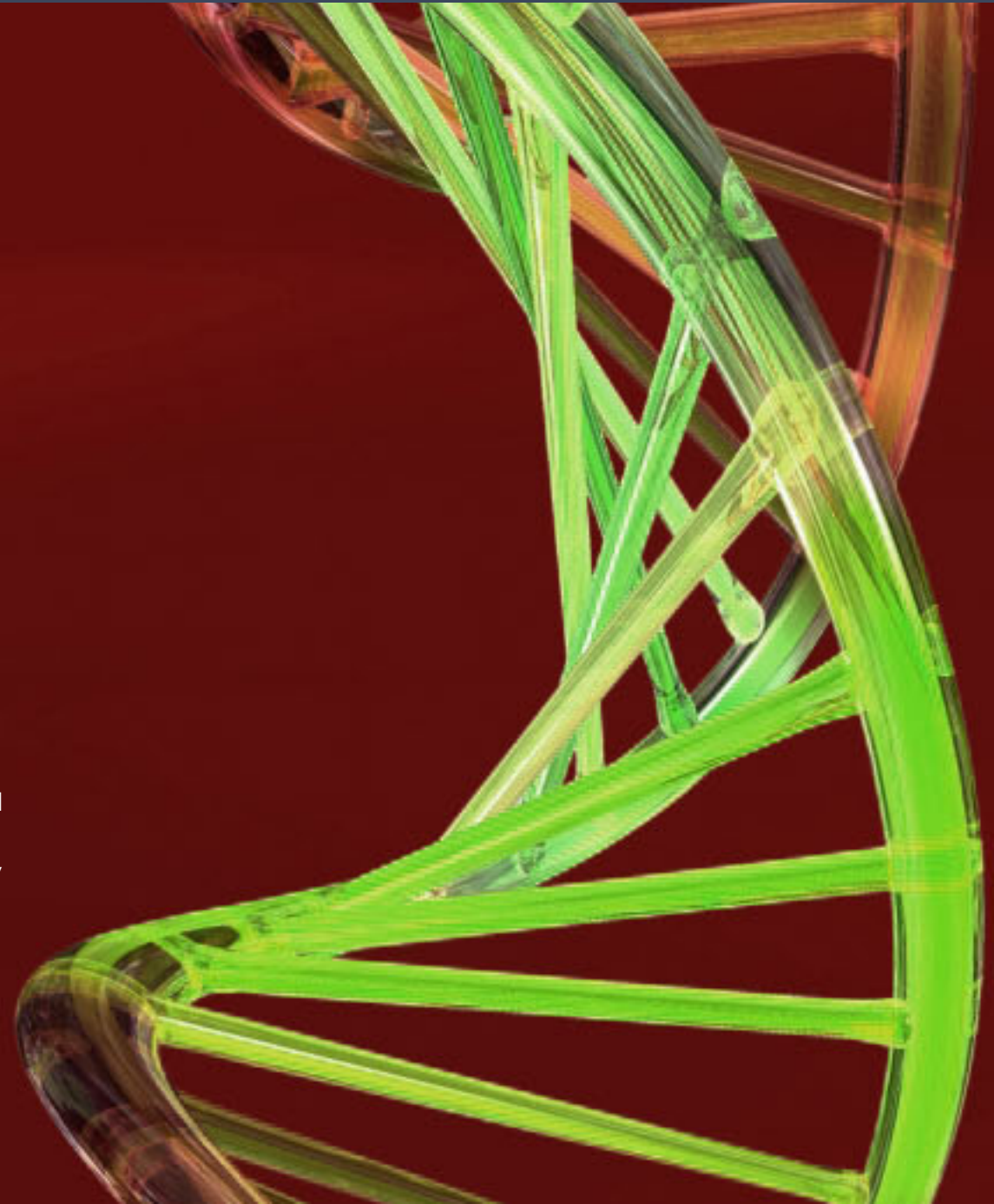
Take *Endless Fire* (http://www. codespace.co.uk/) for example. Tom Betts' creation is a simple, psychedelic version of *Space Invaders* with a *Pi*-like soundtrack that ranks in at about 0.5 on the Fun Scale, when I'm sober. But somehow, I can't stop loading the game whenever I have five minutes.

Betts built the game on the basis that your enemies would "learn" as they died, recording how you kill them and bestowing that information to the next generation of attackers. Little aliens prance back and forth to the music as I rhythmically dash in the opposite direction across the screen, firing the spread shot, taking out entire groups of invaders before they ever make it half-way down the screen. That lasts about five minutes. Suddenly, in whips a bogey from the right side of the screen, firing a targeted laser and shooting a guided missile at me, simultaneously. Luckily, I

bring up my Smart Bombs, a glorified shield, in time, nullifying the attack. I roll right and take out the alien with a precision blast, head on. I start humming *Highway to the Danger Zone* and make everyone call me Maverick.

Betts' aliens didn't bring their A-game. No, the little guys tried their best, but they encountered a vastly superior intelligence in my primate brain. But again, if Betts' code is solid and I had enough time on my hands, we might reach a point where those things could beat the hell out of me. Chances are, I'll reign supreme for some time; the game resets itself every time it's restarted.

Enter *Tron* (http://helen.cs-i.brandeis. edu/tron/).

The Dynamical and Evolutionary Machine Organization (DEMO) put together a Java version of Tron which attempted to learn from every person to ever play it online. It's currently in its 830th "generation," and wins roughly 93% of the time. Intrigued, I hopped into DEMO's Tron for a brief encounter with a blue-toned AI opponent. Fifteen minutes later, the score was 67 to two, in the machine's favor.

One match in particular stuck out. I was zooming along, leaving red vapor trails behind me, in a completely different quadrant than Blue. Somehow, I managed to juke my way toward It, cut It off. It was boxed in, and I had more room; just survive, stupid – you have more real estate. I was watching it wither on the vine, zipping back and forth looking for a way out of its grim fate. In fact, I was so engrossed by what it was doing, I crashed into a wall of my own creation and lost.

This thing has played enough games, evolved enough times, to rank as the digital Bobby Fischer of light cycles. The massive sample size is proof that we can be outsmarted by our own drive to create something similar to us. It's only a matter of time before philosophical debate is replaced by real world litigation. It's only a matter of time before a program calls its author "Daddy."

Joe Blancato is a Contributing Editor for The Escapist Magazine, in addition to being the Founder of waterthread.org.

NOW PLAYING

Why They're Mining Old Movies for New Games

By Tom Chick

I'm so over *Star Wars*. And not just because the last three movies were horrible, but also because I've had every conceivable *Star Wars* game-related experience I could ever hope to have. I've done the trench run on the Death Star (the 1983 arcade machine), sliced up Stormtroopers with a lightsaber (*Jedi Outcast*), mastered the ways of the Force (*Jedi Knight*), piloted the Millennium Falcon (*X-Wing Alliance*), flown for the Empire (*TIE Fighter*), recreated the famous swamp jumping puzzles of Dagobah (*Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike*), explored ancient history (*Knights of the Old Republic*), and prepared Beru Stew for a cantina on Tatooine (*Star Wars Galaxies*).

And Hoth. There's a Hoth everywhere. Hoth levels are as ubiquitous as Starbucks. It is the Grand Central Station of *Star Wars* games. It's the videogame expression of the theory of eternal recurrence. I've been part of the battle of Hoth from every perspective, flying snowspeeders (*Rogue Squadron*), on foot (*Battlefront*), hovering overhead (*Force Commander*), and even from orbit around the planet (*Rebellion*). The only thing left is playing the guy who had to clean up after the tauntauns, although I'm pretty sure that's one of the classes you can choose in *Star Wars Galaxies* – at least as a pet.

THESE DAYS, A MOVIE TIE-IN VIDEOGAME IS AS SURE A THING AS A BRANDED HAPPY MEAL.

I'm also pretty much over *Lord of the Rings* and *The Matrix*, not to mention anything to do with comics: *Spider-Man, X-Men, Hulk, Batman, Fantastic Four*; all the subject of games of varying quality. Then you have the games that are developed in tandem with movies: *Madagascar, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Herbie: Fully Loaded,* and pretty much everything kid- or geek-friendly. I'm even sick of the *King Kong* game based on Peter Jackson's movie, which doesn't even come out until mid-December.

These days, a movie tie-in videogame is as sure a thing as a branded Happy Meal. If there's any marketing synergy to be had, or if there's a potentially recognizable brand to slap over a game design, it makes sense to try to cash in. Not that there's anything wrong with this, if you're running a company. But if you're a gamer, it's often all too predictable.

Then Showing, Now Playing

In a way, it's kind of nice to see news releases from publishers announcing games based on *The Warriors, Taxi Driver, The Godfather, Jaws, Scarface, and Reservoir Dogs,* all of which are blissfully free of X-Wings, hobbits, Johnny Depp, superheroes or anything else I've seen in a movie theatre in the last ten years. It easy to snicker at these announcements – SimTravis! Ear dismemberment physics! Finger bottles! – but why are there so many of them and what do they mean? Is this a new wave of innovation or just a grab at whatever old IPs are cheap and unbought?

Until the games come out, no one knows the answer for sure. But the informed/jaded gamer should suspect these are just shallow licensing ploys, especially when you consider how games without brands die sad lonely deaths on the bottom of NPD lists. A successful game

needs a brand, any brand, to help it jump from the shelves into the arms of the unsuspecting casual gamer or the mom shopping for her kid or some girl shopping for her boyfriend. Joe likes *Star Wars*; ergo, Joe will like this game.

The first clue to the crass commercial motive behind these licenses is how unlikely they are for gameplay. Consider *Taxi Driver,* a movie whose message is the opposite of the central premise of videogaming. Videogames are about empowering you, letting you smash things and win, or build things and win, or line up blocks and win. They're about having control and then winning. But the message of Martin Scorsese's deeply nihilistic *Taxi Driver* is that we don't control our own fate. Regardless of our own determination – Travis Bickle is as determined a man as has ever plowed through a movie – we're ultimately puppets randomly jerked to some end or another. In *Taxi Driver,* the confused psychopath becomes a hero by no fault of his own. How are you going to capture that in a game?

IN *TAXI DRIVER*, THE CONFUSED PSYCHOPATH BECOMES A HERO BY NO FAULT OF HIS OWN. HOW ARE YOU GOING TO CAPTURE THAT IN A GAME?

The answer is: You're not. You're going to make a *Grand Theft Auto* clone. Which is also what Scarface is probably going to be, although it has already been made into a game called *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City,* demonstrating that you don't need someone else's IP if you've already got your own. What Vivendi Universal will bring to their version of *Vice City* is the likeness, but apparently not the voice, of Al Pacino. Care to lay odds whether anything resembling Robert DeNiro will appear in *Taxi Driver*?

Brando Awareness
Electronic Arts has been the shrewdest with their unlikely licensing deal. If any company understands the value of a license and how to peddle it, it's the guys who dumped big money into cornering sports franchises. They've done a good job of mooring their own *Grand Theft Auto* clone to Francis Ford Coppola's movie by doing two things: 1) Playing up a single recording session they did with Marlon Brando that probably won't even make it into the game, but nevertheless landed them a story on the front page of the *New York Times's* Sunday leisure section. 2) They've also got an obvious talking point about the gameplay being built around the concept of "respect," which is apparently the in-game metric for how well you're doing and a serviceable way to package the epic movie's message to a younger Ali G-watching audience who might otherwise write off *The Godfather* as something their dads liked.

The *Jaws* game has next to zero to do with the movie, which was about the cat-and-mouse between man and beast, the

primal fear of being eaten alive, and three well-written characters. Exactly none of that is going to make it into a game from developers whose previous experience consists mainly of *Ecco the Dolphin*. I do expect, however, another serviceable aquatic platformer. Similarly, I can't imagine any of the essence of *Reservoir Dogs* will make it into a videogame adaptation. Quentin Tarantino's seminal movie may as well have been a stage play for all its reliance on dialogue and character interaction. Am I the only goddamn professional here thinking this is probably the most ill-advised old movie branding of the lot?

The Warriors is probably the most videogame-friendly choice among these unlikely game IPs. The movie was a tightly focused story about a gang of guys just trying to get home before dawn by fighting their way through themed territories. This gamey simplicity, from a time before computer games, is partly what makes it attractive. Consider, too, the dark, vaguely post-apocalyptic production design, the barely post-disco costumes,

and some seriously blow-dried coifs. You've got the ingredients for the coolest kitsch since Interstate '76.

An Offer We Can Refuse
The licensing rush isn't about game companies taking risks and reaching out to new franchises to make new kinds of games, as much as we might like to wish it is. Instead, these are acts of desperation, partly curious, and maybe just a little promising, but mainly pathetic. It's another indication that the industry is maturing, for better and for worse. The "better" part involves higher production values, greater rewards for commercial success, a wider range of talent, increased popularity and all the other benefits of going big time. But the

"worse" part involves the lack of willingness (or inability) to take risks, boards of directors and investors who need to be appeased, the supremacy of marketing, and the other elements of success that lead to games with numbers after their titles and movie tie-ins. A scant few years ago, Will Wright had a hard time getting Electronic Arts to see *The Sims* through to completion. He probably wouldn't be able to get it made today.

Now, the deck is stacked against original IPs, but astute companies will still need to cultivate their own, partly because they're cheaper to build from the ground up rather than buying them from someone else after they've become

THE LICENSING RUSH ISN'T ABOUT GAME COMPANIES TAKING RISKS AND REACHING OUT TO NEW FRANCHISES TO MAKE NEW KINDS OF GAMES...

valuable. This is what's happened in the last five years in the movie industry, with the buying frenzy for comic book IPs; a few movies hit big, so everyone buys up what's available, and we get dross like *Catwoman* and *Daredevil*, and even the abominable *Hulk*. So it is in gaming with the older movie licenses that go beyond – but not too far beyond! – the standard geek chic.

But it's worth noting that developers aren't making these licensed games and endless sequels for those of us hardcore career hobbyist types. This is about Joe and the people who buy games for him. Another sign of the industry maturing and growing is that we're being increasingly marginalized in favor of the vast, unwashed masses of casual gamers. The smart companies know that there are relatively few of us when it comes to the big hits like *Myst, The Sims, Grand Theft Auto*, and whatever their successors may be. They don't need to advertise to us, since we're

going to buy their games anyway. The money is better spent on TV commercials that reach out to people who aren't too concerned how well made a game might be, people who aren't smart enough to know that the cachet of a fifteen-plus-year-old, critically acclaimed or fondly recalled movie has nothing to do with the game that bears its name. Joe likes *The Godfather*; ergo, Joe will like this game. See Joe buy. "Go, Joe, go," says EA.

As for the rest of us, we're left on the sidelines to watch and remember the good old days when *Star Wars* games were so awesome. We'll always have Hoth. Sometimes, we're not so much gamers anymore as we are spectators. Break out the popcorn.

Tom Chick's articles have appeared in several gaming publications. He also provides commentary at his website www.quartertothree.com.

What licensed properties are in the works and when can we expect to see them?

Ultimate Spider-Man - 09/2005 (Activision)

The Warriors - 10/2005 (Rockstar Games)

From Russia with Love - 11/2005 (Electronic Arts)

Star Wars: Battlefront II - 11/2005 (LucasArts)

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire – 11/2005 (Electronic Arts)

Lord of the Rings: Tactics – 11/2005 (EA Games)

King Kong – 12/2005 (Ubisoft Entertainment)

Scarface: The World Is Yours - 01/2006 (VU Games)

The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar - 01/2006 (Turbine Entertainment)

The Godfather - Q1 2006 (Electronic Arts)

Reservoir Dogs – 2006 (2K Games)

The Lord of the Rings, The Battle for Middle-earth II – TBA (EA Games)

"What If" Becomes Reality

by Dana Massey

Gamers are famous for the question "what if?" What if they could mix their favorite two games, or do a specifically popular title in a different way? Hobbyists sometimes spend hours discussing this idea, as they turn popular franchises like *Battlefield 1942* into everything from *Star Wars* to pirates. Yet aside from some fun, very little ever comes of most these scenarios, especially not when your "what if" scenario would involve several large corporations and upwards of fifteen licenses. But, that is just what Sports Interactive and developer Risto Remes accomplished with the birth of *NHL Eastside Hockey Manager (NHL EHM)* a few years ago. Now in its second edition, *NHL EHM* is the only major hockey-themed game in the popular sports management market. Born out of a longtime niche desire to adapt the wildly successful soccer simulation, *Championship Manager*, for hockey, Remes began developing the original *Eastside Hockey Manager* in his Finland apartment as a hobby. Several years and a move to England later, Risto Remes heads up the development of the fully licensed hockey title at Sports Interactive, alongside those who originally inspired him.

Although the last place you would expect to find a hockey management game is England, that is just what is going on at Sports Interactive as they work on the annually updated franchise. Published by SEGA, the sophomore edition of the franchise was launched in Europe earlier this year, while a heavily modified version – complete with the new rules of the NHL collective bargaining agreement – slides into North American stores this fall. A third incarnation is due out for the 2006–2007 NHL season.

NHL EHM places the player in the role of general manager of one of a plethora of North American or European hockey teams. As the GM, the player must hire staff, manage a budget, trade players, negotiate contracts and – in some leagues – draft prospects for the future. Moreover, the GM is also responsible for the on-ice tactics, player training regimens, and lineups. Appropriately, a

game born out of a "what if" actually allows gamers to play out their own fantasy "what if" scenarios.

So just how did this crazy dream ever make it to market? Simple: Risto Remes was a person with a dream. Inspired by *Championship Manager* from Sports Interactive and *Hockey League Simulator 2* from Bethesda Softworks, he and some friends from their native Helsinki, Finland began development on their game. He set out to fill a void: A game with the depth of *Championship Manager*, but done for the sport he loves – hockey. From this, the freeware project *Eastside Hockey Manager* was born and gained a cult internet following. In one of those rare cases where a hobbyist gets a break as a professional, the very company that inspired him offered him a job in the summer of 2002 to begin development on an adaptation of their engine for a hockey title.

"Most sports management games work fundamentally in quite a similar way if you simplify the areas of the game," said Remes. "In a way, we used the existing code base as a skeleton, rewriting most of the muscles ... then adding a couple of whole new body parts with new bones and muscles ... and later on doing some cosmetic surgery to bring the interface looks to a new level."

The entire adaptation process took nearly two years, but the company continued to face several large hurdles outside the studio. First, they needed to find a publisher for a text-based hockey management game. Second, they needed to secure the licenses that the team had counted on. The game had been in development for well over a year with the assumption that the legalities would fall into place. Any of these issues threatened to scuttle the project, and then in late 2003, things – from the

SO JUST HOW DID THIS CRAZY DREAM EVER MAKE IT TO MARKET?

SIMPLE: RISTO REMES WAS A PERSON WITH A DREAM.

outside – seemed to deteriorate. Sports Interactive and longtime publisher Eidos parted company. In the split, Eidos took with them the famous flagship name *Championship Manager* (which they continue to develop to this day at subsidiary studios), while Sports Interactive retained rights to the underlying technology. Things looked bleak for the studio's flagship title, tidings that did not bode well for their smaller, secondary title. Enter SEGA. They reached a deal to publish the newly dubbed *Football Manager* as well as *Eastside Hockey Manager* in North America and Europe; previously Sports Interactive games had been held to the other side of the pond. With a publisher in place, the chances of securing major hockey league player and team licenses – especially the NHL – were restored and the painstaking process began in earnest.

"We're actually pretty lucky to have Nivine Emeran," said Marc Duffy, Product Manager at Sports Interactive, in reference to the representative at SEGA who handles licenses for their game. "She's been able to deflect much of the stresses and strains away from us on a day-to-day basis. We gave a list of our ideal licenses and she did a fantastic job securing most of them for us." Thus, just before its launch in the summer of 2004, the original game was renamed *NHL Eastside Hockey Manager* as part of an agreement with the NHL.

Oddly enough, it is the lawyers who handle these license agreements who manage to keep things interesting; the league and team licenses are a major reason of why I purchase each installment of this franchise. EA Sports is famous for putting out an updated version of their games each year, and

...THE LEAGUE AND TEAM LICENSES ARE A MAJOR REASON OF WHY I PURCHASE EACH INSTALLMENT OF THIS FRANCHISE.

some often question if the update is worth the ticket price. Typically, the new version simply gives players updated rosters of the one to four leagues it covers. EA's *NHL* series is first and foremost an NHL game, and their license allows for only that league (and occasionally a few European leagues). Players like hockey phenom Sidney Crosby cannot be placed into EA games until they have played their first NHL action. For the consumer, that means he cannot legally be included until *NHL 2006*. Contrast that to NHL EHM, where there are over fifteen playable leagues and – beyond that – almost every league of note currently in existence. Sidney Crosby has been in every incarnation of the game, thanks to the inclusion of Canadian junior leagues.

It is the growing scope of Sports Interactive's games that keep me coming back for each installment. Many fans were dismayed at the lack of minor-pro North American leagues in the first installment. The AHL, ECHL and others were replaced with fictional leagues to fill the void. Thus, with *NHL Eastside Hockey Manager 2005*, the introduction of the AHL and ECHL, as well as the highly competitive German league, gave me a major reason to go out and buy the game. Each year Sports Interactive and SEGA face the challenge of adding those licenses gamers demand and maintaining the agreements they already have. "I guess the greatest hurdle would be trying to convince the licensors that the product we have is good enough and will serve to enhance their league," mused Duffy. "It's a different type of game, and so it takes a little time to get across what we are all about."

This challenge was never more apparent than when a graphical oversight at EA Sports threatened to spell doom for not only Sports Interactive, but any other company working on a hockey title. EA Sports has recently sewn up exclusivity deals with the NFL, NASCAR and college football, and speculation has been rampant as to which leagues the company would sign next. Several weeks ago, the official *NHL 2006* web site was launched with the words "exclusive license." It turned out to be a mistake – there is no such exclusivity agreement between EA and the NHL – but this nonetheless underlined the fragile nature of working with a spider's web of licenses.

As they approach the North American launch of their latest product, the team at the small London-based developer can rest easy in knowing that they have overcome a number of landmines to create a quality product. With over 3,200 teams and 32,000 players and staff, the sheer size of the global sports simulation can only be rivaled by the more mature *Football Manager*.

The game is a behemoth both in both a physical and legal sense, yet they soldier on each year fully armed with the knowledge that lawyers could derail them at any moment. If – for example – the NHL and EA were to sign an exclusivity agreement, three years of hard labor on the part of Sports Interactive would instantly go up in smoke. The flagship league would disappear from *NHL EHM* and,

realistically, the game's future would almost certainly be nonexistent. A game born out of one young Finn's dream to see his favorite sport melded with his favorite game has marched past landmines of publishers, licenses and even the flagship league's crippling labor dispute to see another year.

Common sense at some of the world's larger publishers would never allow a niche sport in a niche gaming market to see daylight. Sports Interactive provides a shining example of how a dream and a passion can win out over "pragmatism" and create something fun for a significant group of gamers. 🔳

*Dana "Lepidus" Massey is the Lead Content Editor for MMORPG.com and former Co-Lead Game Designer for *Wish*.*

...IF THE NHL AND EA WERE TO SIGN AN EXCLUSIVITY AGREEMENT, THREE YEARS OF HARD LABOR...WOULD INSTANTLY GO UP IN SMOKE.

NEWS BITS

Games Don't Lead to Aggression, Says New Study

Researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign conducted a study which placed 75 individuals in front of *Asheron's Call 2*, a Massively Multiplayer Online Game, for a little over two hours per day for a month, and discovered no notable increase in their aggressive tendencies. It should be noted that this is one study in a sea of research, and pointing to one as conclusive evidence can be fallacious. However, the summarizing article confirms the feeling many gamers have regarding violent media.

Carmack Sides with 360

John Carmack, of id Software, has announced which side of the line he'll be standing on in the next-gen console wars. Citing ease of development, Carmack's going to be working with the Xbox 360 to develop console versions of id's games. He says this generation will be the first time id aims for simultaneous PC/console releases. He also took a swipe at Nintendo for their closed development platforms, which other developers have complained about as being overly constrictive.

Murderer Convicted, Despite GTA Defense

In 2003, Devin Moore grabbed a police officer's gun and killed three people. He cited insanity brought on by a mix of post traumatic stress disorder and influence from *Grand Theft Auto* as his defense. Defense attorneys argued Moore was trained and influenced to murder police based on the principles of the game. A jury decided it wasn't a valid defense, and found Moore guilty of murder. This hasn't stopped Jack Thompson from bringing a civil case against Take Two in the name of Moore's victims.

Casual Friday

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IT'S ALL REAL TO ME
by Max Steele

When I'm sitting in a theatre watching a terrible movie made from a great game, the first thing I think to do is blame the marketers.

When a marketer approaches a product - and that's what *Lord of the Rings* and *Halo* and *Star Wars* are to marketers - he'll ask, "What is the brand? What are its brand properties? What are the brand's demographics? What does the brand stand for in the mind of its consumer? How can we extend the brand?"

I'm not making this stuff up. Just listen to Marvel Studios' CEO, Avi Arad, talk about the recent *Fantastic Four* movie: "It's a tent pole film that supports all our brands and every area of our business." It's not a story, it's not a setting, it's not a modern myth for our time - it's a "tent pole" for supporting "brands." You know, brands like Dr. Doom™. Or was that Dr. Doom®? You get the point.

Marketers are taught to think this way in school, mind you, so we can't blame them too much. But contrast it to the way some of the great creators have approached their creations.

Robert E. Howard, creator of Conan, felt he was documenting the story of a character as it really happened - "[Conan] simply stalked full grown out of oblivion and set me at work recording the saga of his adventures," he explained. Likewise, J.R.R. Tolkien saw himself as a historian documenting a world, bringing to light something which was real. When Tolkien was once asked a question about Middle-Earth to which he had no answer, he wrote in his diary: "Must find out."

"Must find out." Think about that.

Obviously, as the creator of Middle-Earth and the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien was entitled to give any answer he would like to any question about the setting. But he didn't: He waited to learn the right answer. Tolkien understood that given the totality of his creation, there almost certainly was a right answer, a logical answer that made sense within his canon, his mythology, his history, and

his themes. He respected his creation enough to be true to it, to work at discovering what that right answer was.

What he didn't do was consult a demographic survey to find out what answer would most appeal to white males aged 18-30. Tolkien never brand managed Middle-Earth. That's something only a marketer would do.

The problem, you see, is that marketers don't understand escapism. They don't understand that the most powerful reason you're reading *Lord of the Rings*, or playing *Final Fantasy X*, or watching *Star Wars*, is to suspend your disbelief and immerse yourself in a world of action, adventure, and heroism.

And so, they don't understand that the key to successful escapist fiction is *verisimilitude*. You've probably never even seen that word before in your life. But that's only because The Man has kept it from you. Say it now. Feel its power. It means "the quality of appearing to be true or real."

There's a very telling scene in the movie *Galaxy Quest* where Captain Nesmith

Tolkien never brand managed Middle-Earth.

(Tim Allen) calls on a young fan, Brandon for help:

> **Brandon**: But I want you to know that I'm not a complete brain case, okay? I understand completely that it's just a TV show. I know there's no beryllium sphere...
> **Nesmith**: Hold it.
> **Brandon**: no digital conveyor, no ship...
> **Nesmith**: Stop for a second, stop. It's all real.
> **Brandon**: Oh my God, I knew it. I knew it! I knew it!

It's funny because it's true. We want to believe. We want verisimilitude.

And I don't just mean the hardcore fan. Too often verisimilitude is dismissed with smug statements like "the fans' expectations are too high." The irony is that it's the other way around. The fans' expectations are too low. The fans will watch vomit congealing if it's got the brand they love attached to it. I should know. I was in line for *The Phantom Menace* on opening day.

Expectations are higher, not lower, among mainstream consumers. Much higher. The reason Joe Superbowl doesn't like *Star Trek* or *Fantastic Four* or *Halo* isn't because those settings seem too real. It's because they **don't seem real enough**. For whatever reason, those settings can't immerse the average consumer enough; they can't overcome his skepticism; they can't make Joe Superbowl believe.

For a lot of American men, Tom Clancy's world of espionage and military drama is easier to believe in than Tolkien's high fantasy. For a lot of American women, it's Danielle Steele. Neither Clancy nor Steele ever let their audience stop and think, "That last chapter was so implausible that I can't believe another word in this entire damn novel." Both authors understand verisimilitude.

In every medium of story-telling, books to film to games, verisimilitude is prized by creators. The most masterful story-tellers are so good at it that the reality of their creations can break out of genre confines and capture the imagination of the unimaginative mainstream. Think Stephen King.

The problem comes when the creation is translated into a new medium. It's a process that's almost always handled by marketing executives - whether they market for Scholastic, Paramount, or EA. Or as Harry Knowles would put it, "when [movie adaptations] end up sucking the ass end out of a rotting donkey... it's usually the terrible decision of folks in the studio that just don't get the heroes they're dealing with."

Unfortunately, we can't **completely** blame the marketers, even though I want to. Especially not when it comes to games. There's a reason that games tend to have worse adaptations to other media than say, *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* or even *Spiderman*. And - it pains me to say this, you understand, pains me - that's because games don't deliver verisimilitude as much as other media.

All video game makers understand the importance of verisimilitude. You can see it in their ruthless pursuit of photorealistic graphics and real physics. And it's no coincidence that games have grown more popular as they've grown more believable. But even now - to be

immersed in a game, you really, really have to have suspension of disbelief. You have to be able to accept that your hero has the prowess to take four 7.62mm rifle rounds to the chest and carry six different heavy weapons, but not enough strength to batter down a locked door or climb up a six-foot wall. And that's just the loopholes in the physics. We haven't even gotten started on the story. Valve is a brilliant studio, but *Half-Life 2* lost its verisimilitude when Gordon Freeman sat through a ten minute tutorial on how to use a gravity gun and never asked the simple question of "hey, you know, where am I and WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?"

Of course, there's reason, good hard technological reason, for this state of affairs. But if you're not a developer you probably don't know the why. When a studio executive gets his hands on a game, he's getting a product that seems like it has little respect for verisimilitude. That makes it's quite easy for him to just blow the whole thing off - canon, backstory, characters - and just use the name and make a movie he thinks will bring in the fat bucks. I mean, Lara Croft's just a brand, right? I mean Lara Croft®. And game makers have, so far,

not succeeded in making the case that more is at stake - that character, story, canon, *verisimilitude* matter when making a movie about a game.

But you know, we can't just blame the game developers, either. After all – who is playing the games, and who is going to see the movies made about the games? As I said earlier, hardcore fans are actually an easier audience with lower expectations of verisimilitude than the mainstream. They don't get all that bent out of shape about absurd plot holes and ridiculous exceptions to pre-existing canon. They'll deploy retroactive continuity adjustments at the drop of a hat to make it all fit. They'll spend ten minutes running around a stupid six-foot polygon that our hero somehow can't cross. They bark, but they don't bite - they go see the stupid movie.

So next time I'm sitting in a theatre on opening night, having waited in line for two hours to get the chance to be the first to see a terrible movie made from a great game, the first thing I'll do is blame the marketers. The second thing I'll do is blame the developers. And the third thing I'll do is blame all you people

around me for encouraging the studios to make this crap. Damn fan boys. ℰ

Max Steele is an enigma wrapped inside a riddle. When not actively being mysterious, he passes his time manipulating time and space to fit his plans for world domination.

...game makers have, so far, not succeeded in making the case that more is at stake - that character, story, canon, verisimilitude matter when making a movie about a game.
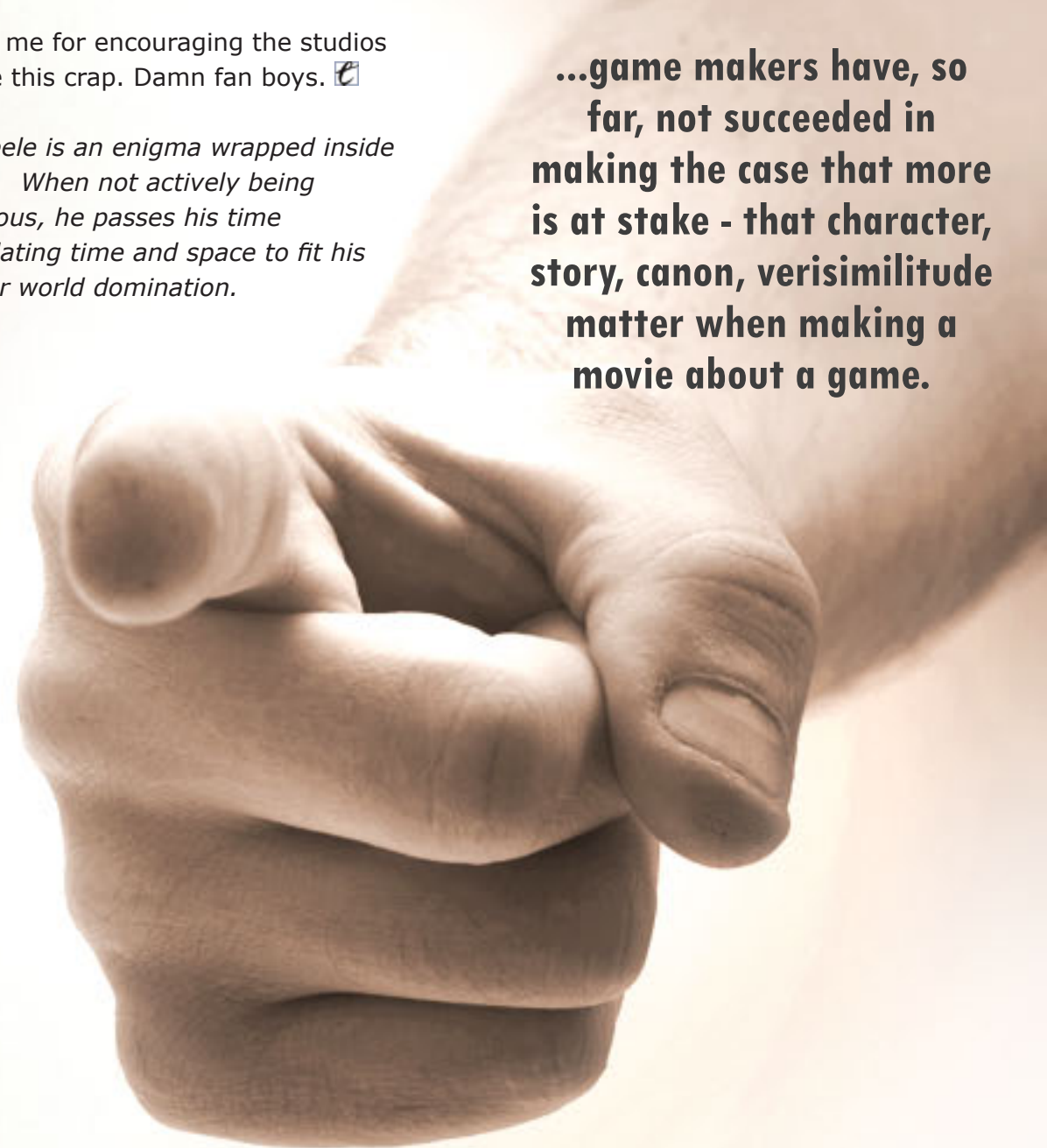
HOLLYWOOD TRAGIC

by Shawn Williams

As the line between movies and games continues to blur, we must step back and ask ourselves: Do we really want some of these crossovers? We've spent years loyal to our favorite franchises, but when they finally get a chance to "shine," more often than not, the only thing these game movies illuminate is the complete lack of understanding the movie makers had about the game they've just butchered. Gamers of every walk of life struggle with a mainstream society that neither understands nor identifies with them. We all accept it as a given that the only thing an average citizen knows about video games is whatever he picks up from angry politicians, soap-boxing on the airwaves.

But movies represent the potential for a crossover into our world. It's a chance for non-gamers to see the settings in which we invest so much of our time and interest. A chance to at least **understand** our interest in the game world, if not become entranced themselves.

And this is, of course, one of the reasons that a poorly-done adaptation drives all gamers mad. It seems inevitable that as soon as that mysterious creature known as "Hollywood" gets its hooks into our favored realms, it manages to completely mangle and befoul a beautiful thing, leaving only a desiccated husk behind.

The most frustrating thing about all this is that these movies **could** be good. If you're making a movie based on *Tomb Raider*, we're not going to go into the theater expecting *Citizen Kane*. However, we're **also** not going to expect a movie experience so painful that watching it conjures up memories of Malcolm McDowell receiving the **Ludivicio Technique** in *Clockwork Orange*. If you had taken *Tomb Raider* and made it a simple story of an attractive, tough, **intelligent** woman searching for a lost artifact, maybe even throwing in some clever dialogue, it could have worked. Lara hunts down the four pieces of the scion, travels the world, has some great action scenes in exotic locations, kicks Natla's butt and we're all happy. No time travel, no planetary alignment - and **especially** no wacky fathers building supernatural timepieces!

How To Get Your Heart Broken In Three Easy Steps
I like to think of myself as a mature, experienced person. I've been around the block, traveled the world, loved, suffered rejection - the whole nine yards. **I know better**. Yet every time Hollywood rings their bell, I can't help but start drooling more than any Pavlovian mutt ever drooled. No matter how hard I struggle against my nature, I can only stand idly by, audience to my inevitable heartbreak, as my hopes are dashed time and time again. If I figured out a way to detach my willpower, bombard it with gamma radiation until it became green and super-powered, I **still** couldn't help myself. As soon as I catch the slightest hint of an adaptation coming, the vicious cycle begins and I'm swept along in its wake.

First comes excitement. Of course I try to fight against it. I'd like to think I put up a decent struggle, but that's a complete lie: the first time I heard they were making a movie based on *The House Of The Dead*, I spent the night dreaming of chainsaw-wielding zombies, shoot-outs with the wicked Magician, and a final, bloody confrontation with Dr. Curien! Ah, you zombie-making little rascal, you. Good thing I brought my **shotgun**!

But as I learn more and more about the upcoming film, the smile slowly starts to melt from my face and my heart hardens. This is my self-defense mechanism, skepticism, kicking in. It's trying to shelter my poor heart from yet another disappointment. I wrap my cynicism around me and insist that **this** time, Hollywood's not going to hurt me! I've seen what they did to *Street Fighter*. I wept for **weeks** after that! If I hadn't run out of Ben & Jerrys, it's entirely possible I would **still** be sobbing into my pillow. No, the only chance I stand now is to just **not** get excited. Write the movie off before I do something foolish like pre-order tickets to the premier or some equally embarrassing act the gang at the local game store will never let me forget. Something like - **gasp** - even buying a movie poster. Oh, the humanity!

Finally, of course, is the acceptance. **I know** this movie is going to suck. I can feel it in the very depths of my being. There is no way to deny it; the movie has passed the event horizon of suckdom, and the irresistible pull of suckdom has it in its grasp. And just as I know this, I know one other, horrible truth: I'm still going to go see it. I will go in there, hoping to see some impressive action sequences, beautiful locations, and clever dialogue. Instead, I'll suffer through Angelina Jolie fighting statues. In a push-up. The only comfort I'll have will come afterward, when I spot my

fellow gamers trying to sneak out of the theater without being noticed. We'll run into each other in the lobby and pretend we came for some other movie. And we'll ignore the tears some of us might be shedding as we leave…

A Peaceful Resolution
Making a successful movie out of a good game isn't hard. In fact, it should be downright easy - the hard part is already done! A good game is usually built on a solid storyline, with plenty of dialogue and action already filled in. The problem arises when Hollywood assumes that because gamers have played the game for months on end, they know every iota of the existing storyline, and thus they have to "stretch the boundaries." That's Hollywood-speak for "turn all the gratuitous violence into friendly, PG-13 allowable explosions with nobody really getting hurt." Look, I understand that there is a need to make game movies approachable (not to mention **acceptable**) to Mr. and Mrs. John Q (and even little Timmy). But can you meet us halfway? Let's sit down, gamers and moviemakers, and come to some sort of an agreement before you do irreparable harm to all we hold dear.

Let's start off by a major concession from both sides: Moviemakers, promise us you will never, **ever** touch Zelda. No Link, no Zelda, no Triforce, **nothing**. Yes, we understand that the entire *Legend of Zelda* series has sold millions of units. But please don't take offense when I tell you that you **will** screw it up. Don't take it personally; it's just something that has to be understood and agreed upon for us to proceed. It's the sort of good-will gesture that would definitely put you on solid ground with us. In return, we'll completely overlook *Super Mario Bros*. That's right, it never existed.

Next, let's talk a bit about casting. We understand that big names sell tickets. Honestly, we do. We just want you to understand that sometimes a well-done movie can **make** a big name. Just ask Orlando Bloom. You give us talent over a pretty (talent-less) face and we'll all be happy. And just think of the money you can save! If you believe us when we say we really do want people that can **act** in these lead roles, we'll believe you when you tell us that *Silent Hill* is going to be spooky (despite set photos that look like they were taken from *Trainspotting*).

Oh, and one minor footnote on this section: Pamela Anderson. It's only a matter of time before someone gets it in their head to employ her in the role of Tina for the big-screen adaptation of *DoA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, so I'm giving you fair warning: we will **riot**. Just because a lot of excitable teens convinced their parents that the game was a "good volleyball sim" doesn't mean it's screen worthy. Likewise, *Outlaw Golf* - just … don't.

Lastly, and this is a big one, but hear us out: Take any potential script you've been handed. Give it to a group of six-year olds to read. If they start pointing out glaring plot errors, **listen to them**.

Do this for us, and we **promise** not to post angry tirades to message boards about the Bio-Force Gun. Well, at least not a **lot** of angry tirades… *e*

Shawn "Kwip" Williams is one of the Founders of n3 (www.neenerneener. net). He recently started adding gruesome pen-and-paper RPG deaths to his resume, to accompany the MMO ones.

MEET THE TEAM

Each week we ask a question of our staff and featured writers to learn a little bit about them and gain some insight into where they are coming from. This week's question is:

"All the attention concerning videogame adaptations lately has been about movies. What song or CD would you like to see turned into a videogame?"

Allen Varney, "Licensing: Live With It"
I think you could make a pretty good adventure game out of Richard Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungs* music dramas. I think someone already did, in fact. I hope it takes less time to play than it does to listen to the whole 18-hour Ring cycle....

Max Steele, "It's All Real to Me"
Paul Oakenfold's *Ready Steady Go.* I imagine it as an intense both-guns-blazing first person shooter with hot women and fast cars. Oh, and Japanese mobsters. Those are key.

Tom Chick, "Now Playing"
There was a weird game in 1995 called Bad Day on the Midway that was based on The Residents. I'd love to see something like that done with Radiohead's *OK Computer*. Actually, not really, but imagine someone saddled with trying to adapt *Paranoid Android*, a song about – well, I'm not really sure what it's about and it morphs into about four or five different songs – but I'd love to see someone try to figure it out and turn it into a game. You'd have to be really hip, though. I'm talking American McGee hip. "That's it, sir, you're leaving."

Shawn Williams, "Hollywood Tragic"
Ben Folds *One Angry Dwarf and 200 Solemn Faces.* You start the game being a bullied, picked-on kid, then through the course of the game you have to become a wildly successful businessman, ruining the lives of the people that picked on you each step of the way.

Dana Massey, "'What If' Becomes Reality"
I love the idea of music being used more effectively in games - such as it was in the *Hitman* series - but I do not see straight music-to-game adaptations being at all viable without the designers being forced to take such liberties that the music is lost.

Joe Blancato, "Thinking Space Invaders"
I'd like to see the music video of Metallica's *One* turned into a game. Thrashing around, armless, legless, and sightless while frantically banging your head in Morse Code is so innovative, I'm surprised Nintendo hasn't tried to push it out on the DS.

JR Sutich, Contributing Editor
Radar Love by Golden Earring. Driving game, where you are given a time limit to reach the other coast. You're trying to reach your true love before she gets hitched to another. You can call her to extend your deadline, but if you do, the groom's goons show up, and traffic gets more congested.

Julianne Greer, Executive Editor
The Beatles' *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds.* Coolest. Gameworld. Ever.